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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ADDIS ABABA 001074

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SUBJECT: SOMALIA: PUNTLAND PRESIDENT PLEADS FOR U.S.
ASSISTANCE

REF: GONZALES-YATES EMAIL 4-15-08

Classified By: Ambassador Donald Yamamoto. Reason: 1.4 (B) and (D).

¶1. (C/NF) SUMMARY. Puntland President Mohamud Musse Hersi told Ambassador on April 9 that the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) was the last hope of Somalia and he was concerned that the TFG was failing. President Hersi emphasized that Puntland was committed to a federal system of government in Somalia and was not seeking independence like Somaliland. He said that the al-Shabaab insurgents were experiencing a revival and he feared that the insurgents would soon be stepping up their attacks against Puntland. The President said that Puntland lacks capacity to fight the extremists and he presented a written request to the Ambassador for USD 15 million to support anti-terrorist programs (Ref). He urged Washington to use caution when targeting terrorists in Somalia to avoid increasing anti-American sentiment among Somalis. He requested that Washington use its influence to restrain Somaliland from aggression toward Puntland. Lastly, he accused the Djiboutian government of supporting al-Shabaab to undermine the TFG. END SUMMARY.

"THE TFG IS THE LAST HOPE OF SOMALIA"

¶2. (C/NF) The President speculated that the TFG is Somalia's last hope for a national government and he was concerned that the TFG was failing. He noted that the formation of the TFG gave hope to the Somali people, but said that hope was disappearing because the reality on the ground had deteriorated and was likely to get worse, barring a more effective TFG. He said that although the international community supports the TFG, the Islamic Courts and the warlords had rejected it. President Hersi stressed that the TFG cabinet was divided, particularly between President Yusuf and Prime Minister Nur Adde. He commented that the cabinet was focused on clan identity rather than governance. Despite viewing the TFG as Somalia's last hope, when asked whether he viewed the TFG as ultimately viable, Hersi chuckled while suggesting "maybe in twenty years."

¶3. (C/NF) The President said that if the Ethiopian troops

withdrew from Somalia, Puntland and Somaliland would survive, but the TFG would fall. He reiterated that in this scenario, the south would succumb to war and chaos worse than what anyone has seen before. As such, he gave little credence to assertions from Addis Ababa that Ethiopia may withdraw from Somalia in the near term.

COMMITTED TO A FEDERAL SYSTEM

¶4. (SBU) President Hersi urged the United States to concentrate on supporting federalism in Somalia by bolstering the capacity of regional administrative units and not just the TFG. He argued that strengthening Puntland was another way of strengthening federalism in Somalia. The President stressed that Puntland will hold elections on January 8, 2009 and "there will be a new president." Although some had been calling for a two year delay of the elections, Hersi noted that he rejected such proposals. A constitutional committee is finalizing revisions to the autonomous region's constitution now and Hersi stated that he expects a referendum on the revised constitution by July.

¶5. (C/NF) Although President Hersi underscored that Puntland was committed to a federal system of government in Somalia and was not seeking independence like Somaliland, he made it clear, however, that he would never accept direct rule "of those ministers in Mogadishu." He added that he did not fight "those people" for 17 years to salute and take orders now. He repeated that his government supported the TFG as a federal government, and reminded the Ambassador that Puntland had sent troops to help defend the TFG.

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AL-SHABAAB RESURGENT, AIAI STILL A PROBLEM

¶6. (C/NF) The al-Shabaab extremists are experiencing a new revival, according to the President. He said that outside countries, including Arab countries and Eritrea, were supporting the insurgents and that they were once again becoming more powerful. As a result, Puntland was under increasing pressure of attack. He said Puntland was a target because it supported the TFG and that extremists were constantly entering Puntland. The President feared al-Shabaab would escalate its attacks on Puntland.

¶7. (C/NF) The President's letter stated that al-Ittihad al-Islami (AIAI) continues to be one of Puntland's biggest threats. The letter said that Puntland was the first target of AIAI in 1992 and after AIAI was defeated the group decided to assimilate themselves into their sub-clans with a long-term ambition to seek power through economic strength, indoctrination of school children, and the gullible with their own extremist interpretation of Islam. The letter notes that AIAI now owns more than 75 percent of all the major import and export houses, telecommunication companies, money transfer agencies, and livestock marketing in Puntland. It claims that many of these businessmen either supported the Islamic Courts in 2006 or are waiting to strike from within if the Islamic Courts succeeds in taking power. The letter also says that the Puntland government runs only 31 percent of the primary schools while AIAI associated institutions runs the remaining 69 percent.

PUNTLAND LACKS CAPACITY (AND AMMUNITION) TO FIGHT EXTREMISTS

¶8. (C/NF) The President said that Puntland had the forces to fight the extremists, but not the capacity because they lacked weapons and, in particular, ammunition. He said the insurgents were better armed and more mobile than Puntland's

forces. He added that the price of one AK-47 bullet had risen from one dollar to four dollars and that Puntland could not afford this. He also said that Puntland had three boats with a top speed of three knots, but that they were fighting extremists and pirates who had 18 knot boats.

¶9. (C/NF) The President thanked the Ambassador for the aid Puntland had received to date, but urged that Washington provide more. The President presented a written request to Ambassador Yamamoto for USD 15 million in funding to assist in four areas: establishment of a banking system to replace existing money transfer methods used by insurgents, education, training and equipment for police and the judiciary, and establishment of a mass media program to combat the extremists propaganda. (Note: Post emailed a copy of the letter to AF/E and Embassy Nairobi on April 15.)

TO U.S.: "USE CAUTION WHEN TARGETING TERRORISTS"

¶10. (C/NF) When queried about the impact of U.S. strikes against targets inside Somalia, the President responded that the terrorists must be stopped at any price, but that the United States must take great care to ensure that the correct targets are hit. He said otherwise the attacks will fuel anti-American feelings among Somalis.

"HELP US WITH SOMALILAND"

¶11. (C/NF) President Hersi asked for Washington's help in Puntland's dealings with Somaliland. The President said he wanted Washington's influence to restrain the Somaliland government. He stated that Somaliland had captured Las Anod last October and had essentially given it over to AIAI as if

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it was 1991-1992 all over again when AIAI controlled this region. President Hersi accused Somaliland of trying to set groups within the same clan against each other in order to maintain control of the area.

DJIBOUTI GOVERNMENT SUPPORTING AL-SHABAAB?

¶12. (C/NF) The President accused the Djiboutian government, with assistance from unnamed Arab countries and Eritrea, of supporting al-Shabaab and other insurgents to undermine the TFG. He asserted that the insurgents and insurgent support was coming through Djibouti, into Somaliland, through Las Anod, and down into Puntland and southern Somalia. He added that the Somaliland government was not complicit, but rather that the Somaliland government was unable to effectively control its territory.

COMMENT

¶13. (C/NF) Puntland, although a small entity of limited capacity, has the potential to be a stronger ally in the fight against terrorism in the Horn of Africa and we believe Puntland could serve as a more effective partner if given more resources. Should the security situation in southern Somalia continue to deteriorate, Puntland's role in Somalia will be even more critical. Therefore, Post encourages Washington to consider providing additional resources to Puntland to build their capacity to confront al-Shabaab and other threats in the region.

YAMAMOTO